

Message Text

SECRET

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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
USMISSION USUN
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 TEL AVIV 0626

EXDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR LEWIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, IS, EG, XF, US
SUBJECT: ISRAEL'S POLITICAL SCENE AS THE COMMITTEES CONVENE

1. WHATEVER LESSONS BEGIN, DAYAN, WEIZMAN, AND ASSOCIATES
HAVE DRAWN FROM THEIR DECEMBER MEETINGS WITH SADAT AND
GAMASY AND SADAT'S ONGOING CAMPAIGN OF NEGOTIATION
THROUGH THE MEDIA, THE THREE WEEKS SINCE ISMAILIA HAVE BEEN
SOBERING FOR ISRAELIS. THEY HAVE SHATTERED THE FANTASY
THAT THE CHASM THAT SEPARATED ISRAEL FROM EGYPT FOR THE
PAST THREE DECADES SOMEHOW DISAPPEARED OR EVEN BECAME
BRIDGEABLE OVERNIGHT. THE "HIGH" OF THE SADAT VISIT IS
HISTORY, AND ISRAELIS FROM THEIR POLITICAL LEADERS ON DOWN
ARE REMINDING EACH OTHER THAT IMMEDIATE AND PAINLESS AGREE-
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MENT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND EGYPT WAS NEVER REALLY A POSSIBILITY.

2. FIRST THE POPULAR MOOD: PEACE REMAINS THE BIG HOPE
AND THE SUPREME ISSUE. IT IS THE TOPIC OF THE DAY AND A
PRIZE WHICH ISRAELIS INTEND NOT TO BE DENIED. MOST ARE
CONVINCED THAT BOTH BEGIN AND SADAT HAVE PROCEEDED BEYOND
THE POINT OF NO RETURN. THE PEACE MOMENTUM, THOUGH SOME-

WHAT SLOWED, IS BELIEVED IRRESISTIBLE. SOMETHING MUST
SOMEHOW EMERGE FROM THE PEACE OFFENSIVE.

3. YET A FEW VOICES ARE HEARD SAYING THAT FULL PEACE AND
NORMALIZATION ARE PROBABLY STILL FAR OFF AND THAT A FALL-
BACK TO ANOTHER INTERIM AGREEMENT, CERTAINLY MORE FAR-
REACHING THAN THE PREVIOUS ONES BUT STILL SHORT OF PEACE, IS
ALL THAT CAN BE EXPECTED FROM THE CURRENT LINEUP OF OPPOSING
POSITIONS. THE PUBLIC NOW SEES THAT SADAT'S KNESSET
SPEECH WAS NOT JUST HIS OPENING NEGOTIATING POSITION BUT MORE
LIKE A STATEMENT OF HARD-ROCK PRINCIPLES. THEY ACKNOWLEDGE
THAT HIS INITIATIVES IN COMING TO JERUSALEM AND BEGINNING
DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS MERIT THE PRAISE AND ADULATION HEAPED
ON HIM. HOWEVER, BEGIN'S PROPOSALS ARE ALMOST UNIVERSALLY
SEEN HERE AS TANGIBLE (HE IS OFFERING REAL ESTATE AS WELL
AS A PLAN) AND FAR-REACHING -- ALTHOUGH SOME ARGUE THAT
HIS PROPOSED WEST BANK CONCESSIONS ARE THE WRONG KIND.

4. IN THE WEEKS BETWEEN SADAT'S VISIT AND PUBLICATION
OF BEGIN'S PEACE PLAN THE PRESS HAD BEEN ALMOST UNANIMOUS
IN URGING BEGIN TO RESPOND ADEQUATELY TO SADAT'S INITIATIVES.
THERE IS NOW A FEELING THAT EGYPT HAS FAILED TO APPRECIATE
THE EXTENT OF BEGIN'S CONCESSIONS AND IS POCKETING THEM
WITHOUT RECIPROCATING (THE MIRROR IMAGE OF EGYPTIAN WORRIES).
BEGIN IS SEEN AS HAVING GONE VERY FAR (MANY SAY TOO FAR) ON
SINAI, AND VERY FAR (FOR BEGIN) ON THE WEST BANK. ISRAELIS
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ARE INCREASINGLY DISCONCERTED THAT WHAT THEY HEAR OUT OF
CAIRO SHOWS NO MATCHING FLEXIBILITY TOWARD SINAI SETTLE-
MENTS AND AIRFIELDS OR THE WEST BANK. WE DISCERN IN CON-
SEQUENCE, THE BEGINNING OF A DIGGING-IN OF HEELS.

5. PROBLEM AREAS: THREE AREAS OF PUBLIC CONCERN HAVE COME
INTO INCREASINGLY SHARP FOCUS: 1) THE FEARED
EVOLUTION OF AN AUTONOMOUS WEST BANK/GAZA INTO AN INDEPENDENT
PALESTINIAN STATE; 2) JEWISH SETTLEMENT RIGHTS; AND
3) UNNECESSARILY GENEROUS CONCESSIONS IN SINAI MADE TOO
SOON. MOREOVER, THERE IS A GROWING APPREHENSION
THAT YIELDING ALL OF SINAI SETS A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT
FOR THE GOLAN. THE GOVERNMENT HAS RESPONDED TO THE FEAR
OF PALESTINIAN STATEHOOD BY DEFINING WITHGROWING SHRILLNESS
AND THHE FREQUENCE THE INTENDED PEERMANENT NATURE OF THE AUTONOMY
SOLUTION AND REPEATING THE UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF NO
IDF WITHDRAWAL AND OF SELF-DETERMINATION FOR "PALESTINIAN
ARABS." IN REGARD TO JEWISH SETTLEMENTS THE GOVERNMENT
HAS, AFTER SOME WAFFLING, COME UP WITH A COMPROMISE, APPROVING

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EXDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR LEWIS

FOUR NEW SETTLEMENTS IN THE WEST BANK AND A "STRENGTHENING"
OF EXISTING SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI.

6. TO BLUNT CRITICISM, THE GOVERNMENT HAS EMPHASIZED
ITS COMMITMENT TO THE RAFAH SETTLERS, AND THE SECURITY
MEASURES, INCLUDING DEMILITARIZED ZONES, WHICH WILL BE
PART OF ANY SINAI WITHDRAWAL. THE NET EFFECT OF THE GOVERN-
MENT'S RESPONSE TO PUBLIC ANXIETY, THEN, HAS BEEN A TOUGHER
EXPRESSION OF ESSENTIALLY UNCHANGED PROPOSALS. THIS MORE
AGGRSSIVE STANCE WAS HIGHLIGHTED IN BEGIN'S SPEECH TO HIS
PARTY'S CENTRAL COMMITTEE EARLIER THIS WEEK. THAT MEETING
OPENED BEGIN'S EYES TO THE EXTENT OF DISSENSION WITHIN
HERUT OVER HIS CONCESSIONS. HOWEVER, CONFLICTING PRONOUNCE-
MENTS BY GOVERNMENT LEADERS, INCONSISTENT AND SHIFTING

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NEGOTIATING DEMANDS REPORTED BY THE LOCAL PRESS, AND LESS
THAN FORTHRIGHT PRESENTATION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION

ON JEWISH SETTLEMENT HAVE LED TO A GREAT DEAL OF CONFUSION AND EVEN SOME CYNICISM IN THE PUBLIC MIND. THE PERIOD IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING THIS WEEK'S COMPROMISE DECISION ON SETTLEMENTS, IN PARTICULAR, LEFT AN IMPRESSION OF LESS THAN FIRM GOVERNMENT CONTROL OVER EVEN THE ISRAELI SIDE OF THE NEGOTIATING TABLE; A RESIDUE OF SKEPTICISM REMAINS.

7. OPPOSITION TO BEGIN: BEGIN HAS SO FAR WITHSTOOD OPPOSITION FROM BOTH RIGHT AND LEFT WITH RELATIVE EASE AND CONTINUES TO REPRESENT A NATIONAL CONSENSUS IN FAVOR OF NEGOTIATIONS. THE LEFT DEMANDS GREATER FLEXIBILITY, BUT IS NO THREAT TO BEGIN'S POSITION. LABOR SPEAKS IN MANY TONGUES AND WEAKLY ATTACKS FROM ALL SIDES. BUT IT DOES HAVE THE POTENTIAL OF GALVANIZING SUPPORT FOR AN ALTERNATIVE TERRITORIAL SOLUTION FOR THE WEST BANK/GAZA PROBLEM IF BEGIN'S APPROACH IS SEEN TO BEGIN TO SLIDE INTO IRRELEVANCY. THE MOST VOCAL--AND FOR BEGIN, WORRISOME--OPPOSITION IS DIRECTED FROM THE RIGHT. ELEMENTS WITHIN BEGIN'S HERUT MOVEMENT, ALONG WITH IDEOLOGICALLY ALLIED GROUPS SUCH AS GUSH EMUNIM AND THE LAND OF ISRAEL MOVEMENT, REJECT THE PEACE PLAN IN TOTO. BEGIN HAS HAD TO MOUNT A MAJOR EFFORT, INVOKING PARTY AND PERSONAL LOYALTIES TO PREVENT THIS INCIPIENT "REJECTION FRONT" FROM DANGEROUSLY ERODING HIS TRADITIONAL BASE OF SUPPORT. SO FAR HE HAS SUCCEEDED. IT IS HIGHLY DOUBTFUL THAT SHARON OR ANYONE ELSE NOW HAS EITHER THE STRENGTH OR INCLINATION TO LAUNCH A RIGHTIST OPPOSITION CAMPAIGN WHICH COULD UNDERMINE THE NATIONAL CONSENSUS WHICH IS THE SOURCE OF BEGIN'S STRENGTH. BUT EVEN THE VAGUE THREAT HAS TO A CERTAIN EXTENT LIMITED HIS ROOM FOR MANEUVER. THE CONVICTION IS SPREADING BEYOND THE CONFINES OF HERUT THAT BEGIN MUST NOT YIELD ISRAEL'S REMAINING CLAIMS IN

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SINAI. WHILE THE LABOR PARTY WANTS A TERRITORIAL SOLUTION ON THE WEST BANK AND THE DMC IS AMBIVALENT BUT GENERALLY SUPPORTIVE OF BEGIN'S PLAN, THE LIKUD AND NRP ARE ALSO DRAWING THE LINE ON FURTHER CONCESSIONS IN HIS WEST BANK PLAN.

SEPARATE PEACE? THE PREFERRED SOLUTION IN ISRAEL REMAINS A SEPARATE PEACE WITH EGYPT, AT LEAST AS A FIRST STEP. THE GOI IS WELL AWARE, HOWEVER, THAT BEFORE HE COULD RISK GOING DOWN THIS ROAD SADAT REQUIRES SUFFICIENT SATISFACTION ON THE WEST BANK TO PROTECT HIS FLANK FROM REJECTIONISTS AND MODERATES ALIKE AND SUSTAIN HIS CREDENTIALS AS A GOOD ARAB. BEGIN HOPES SADAT WILL YET ACCEPT A FINESSING OF THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM TO PERMIT ISRAEL TO NEGOTIATE SEPARATELY NOW WITH EGYPT, AND LATER WITH JORDAN, RELATIVELY FREE OF THE CONSTRAINT OF EGYPTIAN PRESSURE. THIS IS THE STRATEGY THAT

DICTATED BEGIN'S SWEEPING OFFER OF RETURNING ALL SINAI TO EGYPTIAN SOVEREIGNTY. HOWEVER, BEGIN CONTINUES TO CALL FOR A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT AND NO DOUBT HE IS PREPARED TO TACKLE ONE. MEANWHILE THE ALIGNMENT ARGUES FOR YIELDING TERRITORY TO JORDAN, DAYAN EXPOUNDS ON THE NEED FOR A JORDAN LINK, BUT BEGIN APPEARS PUBLICLY RIGID IN LIMITING AMMAN'S ROLE IN THE WEST BANK TO THAT OF BENEVOLENT UNCLE.

8. U.S. ROLE: A SUBTLE SHIFT HAS TAKEN PLACE IN ISRAELI PERCEPTIONS OF THE AMERICAN ROLE. THE PRINCIPLE OF DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS HAS BEEN WON; IT IS INCREASINGLY APPARENT THAT FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT

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FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR LEWIS

HAS BEEN ACCEPTED AS AN INTEGRAL ELEMENT IN THE NEGOTIATING DYNAMICS. THEREFORE ACTIVE AMERICAN PARTICIPATION AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR DIRECT TALKS IS NO LONGER SO THREATENING A PROSPECT. FURTHERMORE, ALONG WITH THE DETERMINATION THAT THERE IS

NO TURNING BACK, THAT PEACE THIS TIME MUST BE ACHIEVED, THERE IS A MORE ACUTE APPRECIATION OF THE DIFFICULTIES THAT LIE AHEAD. AMERICA'S POSITIVE ROLE IN THIS CONTEXT, AS A FACILITATOR, A PARTNER IN THE PROCESS OF BRIDGING OPPOSING POSITIONS, BECOMES INCREASINGLY ESSENTIAL. NEVERTHELESS, THE UNDERLYING FEAR OF AMERICAN PRESSURE AND OF A DEVELOPING AMERICAN-EGYPTIAN ENTENTE REMAINS.

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9. PERSONALITIES: WHILE DAYAN'S INFLUENCE CONTINUES STRONG AND HIS ROLE AS A MAJOR PARTICIPANT IS ASSURED, WEIZMAN IS GAINING GROUND AS BEGIN'S HEIR-APPARENT. HE HAS ALLAYED MISTRUST WITHIN HERUT AND HAS LARGELY REVERSED THE LIBERAL PARTY'S LOW OPINION OF HIS LEADERSHIP QUALITIES. DAYAN AND WEIZMAN HAVE GENERALLY STUCK TO THEIR DIVISION OF LABOR: WEIZMAN'S CONCERNS REGARDING THE TERRITORIES TEND TO ENCTER ON STRICT SECURITY MATTERS, 3.G., AIRFIELDS IN THE SINAI. ON THE OTHER HAND, AS IS BEFITTING HIS LABOR BACKGROUND, DAYAN WORRIES MUCH MORE ABOUT SETTLEMENTS. SHARON HAS SUFFERED A SERIOUS SETBACK; HE NOW APPEARS ISOLATED IN THE CABINET AND HIS OVERALL INFLUENCE HAS BEEN REDUCED. HE WAS VOTED OFF THE DELEGATION TO THE JERUSALEM TALKS AT THE JANUARY 8 CABINET SESSION. THE CABINET ALSO SUMMARILY CHECKED SHARON'S APPARENT END-RUN SALLY TO IMPLEMENT IMMEDIATELY SETTLEMENT PLANS IN SINAI AND THE WEST BANK. THE TWIN DEFEATS TOGETHER WITH HIS KNOWN LACK OF ENTHUSIASM FOR BEGIN'S CONCESSIONS MAKE HIM A PRIME CANDIDATE TO LEAD RIGHT WING OPPOSITION TO BEGIN.

10. BEGIN'S MOOD. ONE THE EVE OF THE NEXT ACT IN THIS CENTURY'S LONGEST RUNNING DRAMA, BEGIN GIVES THE APPEARANCE OF A MAN ABOUT TO ENTER A PASS WHICH HE SENSES MAY BE MINED AND BOOBY-TRAPPED. YOU WILL FIND HIM AS CHARMING AND COURTLY AS EVER, BUT A BIT WARY OF OUR INTENTIONS. HE IS TIRED--ALTHOUGH HE WILL CLAIM HE IS THRIVING UNDER THE PRESSURE AND PACE OF EVENTS-- AND THIS TENDS TO MAKE HIM MORE WINDY AND LESS PRECISE THAN WHEN HE IS IN TOP FORM.

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11. YOU WILL ALSO FIND HIM SOMEWHAT MORE SUSPICIOUS

OF OUR RESOLVE TO PLAY AN EVEN-HANDED ROLE THAN WHEN
YOU LAST SAW HIM. HE IS QUITE TROUBLED OVER HIS DISAGREEMENT WITH
THE PRESIDENT ABOUT WHAT DAYAN AND
THE PRESIDENT DID AND DID NOT SAY REGARDING FUTURE
ISRAELI INTENTIONS ON SETTLEMENTS. FOR HIM, THIS
IS NOT MERELY A MATTER OF DISAGREEMENT OVER THE
ACCURACY OF OUR RESPECTIVE TRANSCRIPTS. HE IS
AGGRIEVED THAT THE PRESIDENT AND YOU BELIEVE HE
HAS MISLED YOU. YOU SHOULD BE BRACED TO HEAR
MORE ABOUT THIS, PROBABLY IN YOUR FIRST SESSION
WITH HIM SUNDAY EVENING.

12. I AM CERTAIN BEGIN SMELLS TROUBLE AHEAD WITH
US: THE "MISUNDERSTANDING" OVER SETTLEMENTS, OUR
SUDDEN ACTIVE ROLE IN TRYING TO GOAD HIM AND SADAT
TOWARD AGREEMENT ON AN AGENDA, THE PRESIDENT'S
COMMENTS IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE YESTERDAY--ABOUT
THE NEAR IDENTITY OF HIS VIEWS WITH SADAT'S--ALL
COMBINE WITH HIS GROWING INTERNAL OPPOSITION TO
MAKE HIM MORE CAUTIOUS AND SUSPICIOUS THAT UNUSUAL.
HOW FLEXIBLE YOU WILL FIND HIM WILL DEPEND, IN PART,
ON OUR SUCCESS IN THE NEXT COUPLE OF DAYS IN NAILING
DOWN AN AGENDA WHICH GIVES HIM THE MINIMUM COVER
HE FEELS HE NEEDS. BEYOND THAT, I THINK YOU WILL
FIND YOUR TALENTS AS A LAWYER DIPLOMAT AND YOUR
PATIENCE QUOTIENT THOROUGHLY TESTED OVER THE
NEXT SEVERAL DAYS.
LEWIS

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